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Mary at Thirteen II

Luke 1:26-37

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Have you known any pregnant, unmarried teenagers? Yes, I see many hands. Of the people you have known, how do they feel? Yes - uncertain, confused, upset. And why not, their world and future are changed. Even more so 2,000 years ago without the notion of abortion. So our Mary, as Carole Ann ably demonstrated in this morning's monologue a moment ago, was also frightened and confused. And *she* knew she hadn't even had sexual relations with anyone.

Did the townspeople believe her? No. Did her family believe her? No. Did Joseph believe her? No. As far as they were concerned, she had come up with this fantastical story of an angel visiting her. So when she or her family went through the town, people would huddle and look in their direction and whisper. And what were they saying? That she was obviously a bad girl, and was so immature in coming up with such a story.

After a while, you get the sense they might say to her, Mary, how about a new story? That one has run its course. Who was he? Who did this to you? You are really a bad girl.

Yet, in all of this, the Scripture suggests that it wasn't Mary's circumstances that 'greatly troubled her.' It wasn't the whispers or the side glances. What apparently bothered her the most were the words spoken to her by the angel. What did he say? He said: "Hail, O favored one. The Lord is with you."

Now I wonder why these words bothered her so much. What we have to do is get beyond our beatific picture of Mary and see it from her eyes, which these marvelous monologues are helping us to do. Mary was visited by an angel of the Lord. She knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that her visitor was an angel, and she knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that her pregnancy was not due to have had sexual relations with any human man. On the other hand, no one believed her, so she could take no comfort, let alone rejoicing, from her family.

So she had two voices playing for airtime in her head. To the voice, 'Hail, O favored one," Mary had a counter voice that said, "I'm not worthy. I'm not lovable." To the voice that said, "The Lord is with you," Mary had a counter voice that said, "I'm not that interesting. I'm not that special." Yet, the angel is saying that God wants to keep her company. The Lord is beside her. Around her. Inside her.

Mary wasn't wealthy. She wasn't from a royal family. Her aspirations were to be the wife of a carpenter in her small town, to have children and to live a full life. In every respect, she was just a normal person. So why did God choose her?

God chose Mary because God wanted to make the point that you don't have to be at the top of (the, a) pyramid to be used by God. And Luke recorded this and included it in his Gospel because, well, because there were people in his world who needed to hear that God uses people who don't think they are worthy, lovable, interesting or special. The people God wants to use are the people who are willing to partner with God. If there's anything that marks out Mary in these stories, it's that Mary is willing to be the handmaid of the Lord.

Do you see how this applies to you? If you are willing to be the hand-man or handmaid of the Lord, God stands ready to partner with you to accomplish his amazing purposes.

My guess is that these words are touching a number of you this morning. People here this morning who, under the façade of how we present ourselves to one another, can agree with Mary - I am not lovable, I am not worthy, I am not special, I am not interesting. Our self-esteem is low, underneath. We think that we need to be way more mature before we can be used by God, and this talk of partnering with God, well, maybe for the really mature Christian, but not for me, certainly not for me.

Well, The Father would take issue with you here. Mary's only claim to fame was her willingness to partner with God, if that was what God wanted. God said, I want to work with you Mary. Mary's response was to say, I can't believe you would want to, but I see that you do want to, and so, I am your handmaid, and will do as you ask.

The other day we had a visit from a woman in her twenties or thirties perhaps, who was looking for one of our twelve step meetings. She was in need of help, and especially in need to talking with someone. For another reason, the Lord brought to our Church Office at about that same time, another woman, someone who is active in our church. The active church woman is an alcoholic who has been sober for over a dozen years, and saw something in the younger woman, and took her aside. The younger woman had decided to stop drinking three days before. God brought these two people together, and a God-moment (a xairos moment) ensued.

The slightly older woman, our active church member, listened with ears that could really understand. And, after hearing acceptance and love, the younger woman prayed to accept Jesus as her Savior and Lord, as led by our member. It was a sacred moment. Not because of the prayer for salvation as much as the willingness of two people to be present and to be used by God - to begin healing for one, and to continue healing (and ministry) for the other.

Are you willing to be used by the Father? Are you willing to be led by the Spirit, just as Jesus was led in his earthly ministry two thousand years ago? It's not about how unspecial or uninteresting you are, or what your opinion may be of your lovablenss or worth. It's about whether or not you are willing to be used by God, to partner with God in the work he wants to do with us. If God can use an ordinary teenager for an amazing purpose, he can use you too.

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